

Judy Antrim has been selected as the 2016 Southeast Maricopa First Things First Champion for Young Children.

The award is given to local champions who actively volunteer their time to raise public awareness of the importance of early childhood development and health. Champions spend a significant amount of time volunteering with FTF and building public awareness about the importance of early childhood issues.



Antrim engaged in awareness-raising efforts such as:

- Providing information to families at the Family Literacy Nights at Sossaman Early Learning Center and Cooley Early Learning Center on behalf of FTF.
- Attending an Early Childhood Every Day training on early childhood messaging
- Helping East Valley families connect with FTF through community events such as the Mesa District 2 Building Strong Neighborhoods event.
- Volunteering in the FTF Mesa region office to organize literacy materials.
- Showing support for Mesa's Early Childhood Task Force.

For decades, Antrim has worked with East Valley families seeking resources and support at the Apache Junction Library. Judy specifically enjoyed working with parents and caregivers of children in the birth to five population. We recently caught up with Antrim of Mesa, who retired from the library.

**Question: Why do you feel early childhood development and health is so important?**

**Answer:** Preschoolers are our future. The majority of their brain is developed by age five. By providing an environment rich in experiences and proper health care, they will be ready to succeed in school.

**Q: What caused you to get involved in efforts to increase public awareness in early childhood issues?**

**A:** Upon retirement, I knew I wanted to continue increasing the public's awareness on the importance of early childhood development. Empowering parents with solid information that can be used on a daily basis with their child is priceless. First Things First felt like a good fit for me.

**Q: Why do you feel building awareness in early childhood and developmental health is so important for families and communities?**

**A:** Everyone benefits. The least amount of funding is spent on the 0-5 age group yet these are the most important years of development. This is a new concept to some parents. By spending funding at this age in prevention, less funding will need to be spent in intervention in future years.

**Q: How have you seen awareness for the early years change in your community?**

**A:** Research shows 90 % of the brain is developed by age five. Our society has begun to change its way of thinking about these early years. They are much more important than was previously thought. Parents are becoming enlightened through various ways: attending parent workshops, enrolling their child in quality preschools, using library resources, asking questions and attending First Things First events.

**Q: How do you suggest other people in your community get involved?**

**A:** Volunteer. It's more rewarding than any job you've ever had. I love participating in outreach events. Having preschoolers and their parents together provides interaction opportunities to both age groups. Inform the members of a group you belong to about the importance of these early years. Contact your City Council and legislators about early childhood issues. Your vote speaks volumes. Speak before your neighborhood school PTA. Ask each person you interact with to spread the word, also. First Things First will provide training to do this. Once again, everyone benefits, especially the preschoolers!